

I could see the Great Oak from my home and would visit nearly every day or night - sometimes alone, sometimes with my wife and children. It was calming to sit with the tree in silence. The tree offered a strong and comforting presence.

The gigantic trunk, vast canopy, and gnarled limbs spoke of all the Great Oak had witnessed: the Lenape gathering its acorns, the European settlers with their church and town, Washington and Lafayette planning a young America's fight for Independence. The tree spanned from the Middle Ages to the Digital Age.

I was shocked when the tree was declared dead and must come down. It was alive for over 600 years — some part of me thought (or wished), it was immortal. But the unthinkable was real; the tree was coming down. I had to commemorate this example of nature's remarkable majesty and beauty.

The challenge faced was how to convey all the beauty, strength, history, and wisdom contained in the tree; how to keep alive all that would be lost when the tree came down? The tree presented a tremendous responsibility, because it was alive and loved by many, but unable of speaking for itself. The film had to give it a voice.

Personally, I also hoped the process of creating this film would define for me what magical power was exerted by the tree. There were two elements that worked together. First, the tree bore witness to so much I wanted to know about. What was this land like before the arrival of Columbus? What was the conversation like between the friends and comrade-in-arms Washington and Lafayette? What was learned from hundreds of years of souls being laid to rest? Second, the Great Oak had a life of its own. Did it feed off all those buried amongst its roots? Did it feel isolation with no other trees nearby? Was it ready to go?

There was no question I would make a documentary, but I also wanted the community to participate with their various talents and inclinations. Painters, historians, musicians, arborists. I wanted to map out the mysterious place where the Great Oak truly lived; to tap into the poetic, abstract, otherworldly. I think the strongest moments of the film are when the music, sounds, and images speak for the tree.

I still can't explain in words why I loved the tree so much, I can only say I'm more sure than ever I do. And hope my film expresses gratitude I have for the tree and the tremendous sadness of its loss.